

1. THE LITTLE OLD LADY CROSSING THE STREET

I believe it was Francis Schaeffer who discussed this problem. Imagine...

You're walking down the sidewalk one afternoon, and ahead you see a little old lady trying to cross a busy street. The old woman looks around, leaning on her cane, the cars flying past her. You have three options:

1. You can avoid eye contact. Perhaps she won't actually stop you and ask for help.
2. You can stop and help the little old lady cross the street.
3. You can shove her in front of a car.

All of these are equally valid options if God doesn't exist. If humanity had no purposeful creation, we cannot have a purposeful existence. A toaster makes toast because it was made for the purpose of making toast. But if we have no manufacturer, it really doesn't matter what we do. I've never met a consistent atheist (...and we institutionalize consistent relativists), but the fact stands. Without God, we can never say *ought*. Without purpose, there is no basis for morality. Schaeffer often quoted the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre who explained that without an infinite reference point, humanity is meaningless.

To quote a philosopher of an earlier era, "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" (Eccles 1:2). The key to understanding human significance lies outside of this universe. And if there is nothing out there, we have no point of reference by which actual meaning—meaning in reality and not just make-believe meaning—can be determined. Without a God who actually exists right now and who has communicated to us, we are absurd. Humanity cannot live without God.

Only in Christianity do I find an answer to the human predicament. Here I see a God convicting the guilty, then offering to take their punishment himself. I see Jesus of Nazareth, claiming to be the Son of God, offering his life as a ransom for us.

I see what the German reformer Martin Luther called the *Great Exchange*, whereby Christ takes what we have lots of—guilt and failure. Jesus takes our guilt and failure to himself and is punished in our place, so that the judgment that once loomed over us is quenched. Then he takes what he has lots of—the worthiness he spent three and a half decades earning—and he gives it to us freely when we turn to him. Thus he is condemned in our place, while we are blessed and embraced in his place. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

Why am I a Christian? There are many reasons, but at the level of basic intellectual foundations, I am a Christian because I have no alternative. Christianity is not the *best* answer to the human predicament. Christianity is the *only* answer. Without it, we are either absurd or damned. We can live neither with God nor without God... unless Jesus Christ was telling the truth when he spoke to humanity.

Greg Johnson
St. Louis Center for Christian Study

St. Louis Center for
Christian Study
Serious training for Christians

201 S. Skinker Blvd St. Louis MO 63105
314 721 3314
www.christianstudy.org www.gregscouch.com

If there is no God, we're absurd.
If there is a God, we're damned.
Humanity cannot live without God.
Humanity cannot live with God.
This is the human predicament.
Christianity is not the best answer to this problem.
Christianity is the only answer.



Why I'm
Compelled
to be a
Christian

Two stories about little old ladies that leave me no alternative to belief



But if the overwhelming majority of human beings find Option #3 morally objectionable, then we should recognize that there are universal human values. We should suspect that there is genuine right and genuine wrong—not just wrong for me, or wrong within my culture, or wrong within my discourse, as Foucault would say—but wrong *in reality*. If people don't choose Option #3 roughly a third of the time, then our human nature drives us to conclude that we do have purpose and real morality—a conclusion that can only be answered by a God who exists and has spoken to humanity.

2. THE LITTLE OLD LADY & THE GOOD POLICEMAN

But if there is a God who actually exists and has spoken, the human predicament is still far from solved. If we have this universal sense that there is a right and there is a wrong, but have not consistently sought after the right and the right alone, then we're in trouble. Consider the story of *The Little Old Lady and the Good Policeman*:

The Good Policeman was walking down Main Street one day when he saw a little old lady with a cane trying to cross the street. As he watched the little old lady, he saw a large Buick fly past him and come to a screeching halt next to the little old lady. Three young men hopped out of the car, laughing with sneers upon their faces. One of them pushed the old lady to the ground, while another started kicking her in the abdomen, then in her legs, and then in her face.

Even from a distance, the Good Policeman could hear bones crack. Finally, one of the young men did the unthinkable. He pulled a knife out of his belt, pushed its cold metal against the woman's neck, pushed his weight into it, and slit her throat.

The Good Policeman witnessed these events. So as the men walked back toward their vehicle, he rushed up to them and thrust his hand out in front of them and said, "Hi. I'm the Good Policeman. And I want you to know that I LOVE you."

What's wrong with the story of the good policeman? Is it a 'good' policeman? Of course not! A good policeman would have run up to the men, arrested them, and taken them to court to be punished! This is not a good policeman, but an evil one! *If he were truly good, his goodness—his justice—would require the guilty to be punished!* How often we naively expect God to be like the Good Policeman—all love and mercy and grace, with no punishment, no justice, no vengeance, no anger, no wrath.

What does it mean for us if there is a God who exists and has spoken? A good God cannot be good unless he punishes evil. If there is a God who has spoken, and if we have not set all our thoughts after him as we ought, then we're in trouble. Big trouble. If there is a God who has spoken, we're damned. Humanity simply cannot live with God.

If there is no God who has spoken, we're absurd. If there is a God who has spoken, we're damned. Humanity cannot live without God. Humanity cannot live with God. This is the human predicament.

Christianity is not the best answer to this problem. Christianity is the only answer.

3. THREE CONTENTENDERS: JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM

When I consider the three great religions that acknowledge one God who has spoken, I see only one of them with any answer at all. I see Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Judaism once had something of an answer in its sacrificial system where human guilt was symbolically transferred to animals that were then sacrificed—punished—in our place. These were the original *scapegoats*. But Judaism in its classical sense no longer exists.

In 70 AD, just forty years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish temple was destroyed by Roman armies and never rebuilt. A great religion that once had something of an answer now—by its own ancient definitions—has had no forgiveness for two millennia. Granted, later Jews have reinterpreted their religion, but that's what *human beings* have done. What we're after is the genuine article—not myths that people invent to feel better, but a genuine answer from a real God who really has spoken.

Islam fares no better insofar as an answer is concerned. God's power as creator and judge is presented clearly in Islam, but an answer for the guilty human is absent. Perhaps, it is hoped, God in his mercy will simply acquit the guilty. But how could that happen if God is good? Islam can provide no hope to those of us who have failed God. Perhaps I've never murdered a lady in the street, but I can never claim to have sought God with all my heart all the time. I haven't consistently sought him for five minutes. The human predicament is still unresolved.